

## **Frequently Asked Questions About USAID's Family Planning and Reproductive Health Services**

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Since 1965, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) has supported international health assistance programs that provide voluntary family planning services. This support has saved the lives and health of women and children, helped stabilize world population, protected the environment, and promoted U.S. political and economic interests in the developing world. USAID is the world's largest bilateral donor contributing to these programs.

- **How fast is world population growing?**
- **Why is family planning assistance such a critical public health priority?**
- **Why is family planning crucial in the fight to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS?**
- **How does family planning empower women, their families, and their communities?**
- **Isn't the US imposing these programs on poor nations and on poor women?**
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- **What does USAID's family planning assistance do?**
- **Has USAID's family planning assistance been successful?**
- **How much do we spend on USAID's international family planning assistance?**
- **Are USAID funds used to perform or promote abortions overseas?**
- **Why do countries where population growth is declining still need family planning assistance programs?**
- **Why do Americans support international health assistance?**

### **How fast is world population growing?**

Though the rate of population growth is slowing, the world's population, now at 6.1 billion, still adds another 80 million to the planet every year. That's approximately equivalent to adding another New York City every month, another Mexico every year, another India every decade.

In addition to improving the health of mothers and their children, family planning programs have made a major contribution to reducing population growth rates. If

these programs are sustained, developing world population is projected to reach a level of about 9 billion in the year 2050. Without such programs, that population could grow to more than 11 billion in 2050.

Other factors also contribute to slowing population growth, including improving women's education and status, increasing child survival and reducing poverty.

### **Why is family planning assistance such a critical public health priority?**

Family planning assistance is a critical public health priority: it saves lives, improves health, contributes to healthier children, and prevents abortion. Each year, more than half a million women (at least 1 woman every minute of every day) die from causes related to pregnancy and childbirth; 99% of these deaths occur in developing countries. These women leave behind at least a million motherless children whose risk of dying is great. Every day, more than 30,000 children under age 5 die - many from low birth weight or from other pregnancy-related complications. Family planning could prevent 1 out of 4 of these deaths because these programs help women postpone early, high-risk pregnancies, give women's bodies a chance to recover from a previous pregnancy, and provide access to contraceptives which are proven to reduce unintended pregnancies, and so reduce abortions. Spacing births longer improves women's chances of surviving pregnancy and childbirth and they are healthier during and just after pregnancy. USAID-supported research has found that children spaced 3 years or more are healthier at birth and more likely to survive infancy and childhood through age 5.

### **Why is family planning crucial in the fight to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS?**

Family planning is crucial in the fight to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS. Family planning programs, with years of experience addressing individuals' and couples' sexual and reproductive health needs, are well-placed to help prevent HIV/AIDS, help those who are HIV negative stay negative, or keep one partner from infecting the other. Since HIV is currently incurable, prevention is vital. Half of all new HIV infections in the developing world are among women and nearly 10

percent of infections are among infants and children, who become infected through mother-to-child transmission.

### **How does family planning empower women, their families, and their communities?**

Family planning can expand life choices for women and girls. Postponing early marriage and childbirth among girls and young brides by offering family planning choices increases their chances of receiving a good education. Education is vital not only to women's individual development, but to that of their children as well as to the social, political, and economic growth of their community. Men and women who participate in USAID-supported family planning programs want to. They desire the information they need to make appropriate decisions about their family size and the spacing of their children.

### **Isn't the US imposing these programs on poor nations and on poor women?**

No. Men and women who participate in USAID-supported family planning programs do so on a voluntary basis, free of coercion, and with the information they need to make appropriate choices regarding their use of contraception.

Couples want smaller families. Recent surveys show that desired family size is smaller than actual size in almost every country in the developing world, regardless of religion and culture. More than 120 million women in developing countries would like to postpone or stop having children but are not using modern contraception, and the number of reproductive-age couples is expected to increase by at least 15 million each year.

The vast majority of the world's nations recognize that family planning programs play an important role in human and economic development. About 130 national governments subsidize family planning services, including about 65 developing countries that specifically seek to slow population growth. USAID assists countries only at their request. No USAID family planning funds go to China.

## **How can family planning programs help protect the environment?**

A healthy environment is vital to ensuring the health of our families, and vice versa. Rapid population growth can result in using up the environment's resources - the trees, the water, and the wildlife - more quickly than they are replaced. For example, encroachments on the environment have led to new infectious diseases while water shortages are seriously affecting people in the developing world. The World Wildlife Fund's Living Plant Report (2000) has estimated that the Earth's ecosystems and renewable natural resources have declined 33 percent over the past 30 years while demands on these ecosystems have increased by more than 50 percent. The facts speak for themselves:

- More than 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of the world's people live in areas suffering from chronic water shortages.
- Each year, some 40 million acres (nearly the size of Washington State) of tropical forest disappear as trees are cleared for crops, human settlements, and fuel wood.
- Three-fourths of the world's agricultural lands are degraded and cities are filling with people leaving rural areas because of expanding population and failing land.

## **What does USAID's family planning assistance do?**

USAID's family planning programs involve a range of programs, from health to social to technical interventions and assistance. USAID supports programs in more than 60 countries in Africa, Asia, Latin America, the Caribbean, Eastern Europe, and the former Soviet Union at the host government's request. The Agency's strategy for family planning and reproductive health is to provide high quality, voluntary health care services that are easily available to many people. Essential elements of our programs include counseling and services, training of health workers, contraceptive supplies and their distribution, financial management, public education and marketing, and biomedical and contraceptive research and development. USAID support is based on a broad reproductive health approach which emphasizes choice among a wide range of

contraceptives, improved quality of care, and client-centered services. USAID family planning and reproductive health programs are increasingly integrated with other community-based efforts to improve maternal and child health, enhance women's status, and prevent HIV transmission and other infectious diseases.

### **Has USAID's family planning assistance been successful?**

USAID's family planning program is one of the most successful components of U.S. foreign assistance. Since the Agency began providing family planning services in 1965, the use of modern family planning in the developing world has more than quadrupled, going from less than 10 percent to more than 40 percent. In the 28 countries with the largest USAID-sponsored family planning programs, the average number of children per family has declined by 1/3rd, from more than 6 to less than 4. For example, densely populated Bangladesh, the number of children per family has fallen by nearly in half in just four decades. In the 1960s, fewer than 10 percent of women in Bangladesh used a modern family planning method and families averaged over six children. Today, 42 percent of women use a modern method, and couples are having, on average, just above three children per family.

Early USAID investments in family planning helped stabilize population growth in strategically important countries and contributed to the strength of U.S. trading partners such as Korea, Taiwan, and Thailand, as well as strategically important countries such as Egypt and Indonesia. The U.S. now exports more to South Korea in one year than the total level of U.S. assistance ever provided.

Secretary of State Colin Powell has said it best: "... (family planning) is a wise investment, it is a good use of the people's dollars to invest in activities outside our borders which affect us more and more directly every day because of the nature of the changing world and the impact of globalization. We are not alone. We are not an island anymore. And the investments we make overseas will redound to our credit in due course. This is ... the work of the American people."

### **How much do we spend on USAID's international family planning assistance?**

This valuable work is done at low cost. The United States will spend \$446 million this year - at the cost of approximately \$1.70 per American - on international family planning programs. This represents only about 200ths of one percent (0.02%) of the U.S. development assistance budget.

- This money will provide services to 20 million women, prevent abortions, and save the lives of thousands of women and hundreds of thousands of young children.
- These programs work - programs supported by the U.S. help millions of women in poor countries and are one of the notable success stories in our nation's efforts to reduce poverty around the world.
- Our contribution directly helps people in other countries, but it is a good long-term investment for us in the United States as well.

### **Are USAID funds used to perform or promote abortions overseas?**

No. Since 1973, under the Helms amendment to the Foreign Assistance Act, USAID has been prohibited by law from using funds to support abortions as a method of family planning. Several procedures are used to ensure that the law is strictly followed. These include legally binding provisions within USAID contracts forbidding such activity, staff monitoring, and regular audits by nationally recognized accounting firms.

On January 22, 2001 President Bush issued a memorandum restoring the Mexico City Policy, which had been in effect from 1985 through January 22, 1993 when President Clinton overturned it. The Mexico City Policy was introduced to ensure that USAID assistance for family planning only went to foreign organizations that were not associated with abortion-related activities. The policy requires that foreign NGOs agree not to perform or actively promote abortion as a method of family planning as a condition for receiving USAID population assistance for family planning activities. The policy is consistent with the Agency's position that it does not fund abortion and that the best way to prevent abortion is to expand the availability of family planning information and services. The Mexico City Policy does not have a major impact on the provision of family planning services. Very few countries where USAID works permit abortions

under circumstances broader than those allowed under the Mexico City Policy, and few organizations have a history of lobbying for change in the legal status of abortion.

In fact, as research -- and common sense -- indicates, increased access to family planning helps prevent the need for abortions. In Russia, for instance, because of limited contraceptive availability, abortion has been used as the major method of birth control. However, the recent increased availability of modern family planning methods has already resulted in a greater than one-third drop in the abortion rate. In Hungary, the introduction of modern contraception coincided with a 60% reduction in abortions. Similar results can be seen in Chile, Colombia, Mexico, South Korea, Kazakhstan and Ukraine.

80 million pregnancies worldwide are unintended, and over half of these end in abortion as a result. As increasing numbers of people feel more strongly about having fewer children, family planning services will become even more critical. Already, approximately 78,000 women die each year from unsafe abortions -- often self-induced.

### **Why do countries where population growth is declining still need family planning assistance programs?**

The need for family planning services still exists even where population growth is declining. While there has been a decline in births in many developed countries, the goal of ensuring all couples can voluntarily plan the timing and number of their births remains an important one. In the developing world, many people continue to have mistimed or more pregnancies than they desire because they lack the information and services they need. Additionally, the largest cadre of youth in history - more than one billion - are entering their reproductive years and their health and increased family planning needs will have to be addressed.

- World population is now more than 6.1 billion people and is still increasing at roughly 77 million human beings annually.
- The number of women of reproductive age is expected to grow to 1.8 billion by 2015, further increasing the need for family planning services.

- Couples in developing countries want smaller families. Surveys show that desired family size is smaller than actual size in almost every country, regardless of religion or culture. At least 120 million married women of reproductive age (ages 15-49) would like to postpone their next pregnancy or to not have more children but do not have access to or are not using contraception.
- There is a large youth cohort that will impact world population for the next 40 to 50 years. Each year the number of young people who are entering their reproductive years increases by 15 million. These young people will need access to and information about family planning and reproductive health options if they are to make reproductive decisions that will benefit them, their families, and their communities.

### **Why do Americans support international health assistance?**

A study conducted in 2000 by the RAND Corporation showed 8 in 10 Americans favor U.S. aid for voluntary family planning programs in the developing world. In addition, 92 percent agree that couples should have the right to decide the number, spacing, and timing of their children and should have access to the information and means to do so. Their reasons are diverse -improving the health of women and children, enhancing women's status, helping to alleviate world poverty, stabilizing population, protecting the global environment, promoting economic development overseas, or pursuing the economic self interest of the United States. Another survey by the Gallup Organization, taken in 2002, also shows that 73 percent of Americans believe the health of the world should be a concern to the U.S. because health is a global issue; 67 percent believe the US should be involved in global health policy to protect Americans' health; and 64 percent believe we must be involved to protect America's vital interests.